

the link

WINTER
2014-2015



VA Nebraska-Western Iowa Health Care System



REGISTRATION TO OPEN
FOR **2015 NATIONAL**
VETERANS GOLDEN
AGE GAMES,
COMING TO OMAHA, NEB.

8

eye on nwi

Eileen Kingston, RN, MPA | Acting Director, VA NWIHCS

Health care systems like the Veterans Health Administration are at a critical moment in history due to advances in health research, technology and new options being made available to Veterans and all Americans with the implementation of health care reform.

Partnering with patients by providing proactive, personalized and patient-driven care is the direction the health care sector is taking. It is what health providers need to do to stay relevant to patients, create better patient experiences and long-term outcomes and provide timely care at lower costs.

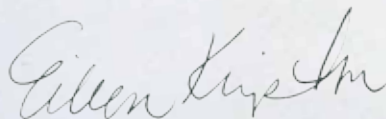
As Veterans are presented with new health care options, we must make the shift to being more innovative and Veteran-centric through our people, our facilities and our online services to become a provider of choice.

VHA's Strategic Plan builds on the foundation we've been laying for the last decade. We've been improving health outcomes, becoming more Veteran-centric, and putting Patient Aligned Care Teams in place. Read more about VHA's "Blueprint for Excellence" in this edition of The Link.

We're making a major cultural shift in the way we will offer care and relate to Veteran patients and their families. We want to be their partners in health.

Each of us has a role in a Veteran's experience, and that experience has an impact on their wellness and well-being.

The concept of personalized, proactive and patient-driven care represents the reason why so many VHA employees come to work each day. It enables us to be truly involved and to see our impact upon those we serve.



**ACTING DIRECTOR
AND PUBLISHER**

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Photographer | Bruce Thiel

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FACT: THE VETERANS INTEGRATED SYSTEM NETWORKS (VISN) REORGANIZATION ACT OF 2013 DIRECTED THE SECRETARY OF VETERANS AFFAIRS TO ORGANIZE THE VETERANS HEALTH ADMINISTRATION (VHA) INTO 12 GEOGRAPHICALLY DEFINED VISNS, DOWN FROM 23. THE SECRETARY ANNOUNCED THIS WEEK THAT UNDER THE MYVA INITIATIVE, VA WILL BE REALIGNED INTO FIVE REGIONS.

A Veteran gets ready to throw a discus at the 26th National Veterans Golden Age Games. (Courtesy Photo)



the link

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“I respect Veterans’ love of country and that they served in the military. We are in a place [Dialysis] where we see people often. We get to know them as a person and have heartfelt feelings for them.”

Audrey Green, RN
Dialysis Nurse | Omaha VAMC



VA Announces Single Regional Framework Under MyVA Initiative



To Protect and Defend: VA NWHCS Police Service Welcomes New Chief



The Christmas Mouse Provides Holiday Magic



The 2015 National Veterans Golden Age Games are Coming to Omaha



Caring Kind Award Presented to Omaha VA Employee



WWII Veteran Graduates High School



Compassionate Nursing Care Extends Beyond Clinic Walls



An Introduction to The Blueprint for Excellence



VA Views | ESGR Award



This magazine is an authorized publication for VA Nebraska-Western Iowa Health Care System (VA NWHCS). Contents of The Link are not necessarily the official views of, or endorsed by, the U.S. government, or the Department of Veterans Affairs. The editorial content of this publication is the responsibility of the VA NWHCS Public Affairs Office.

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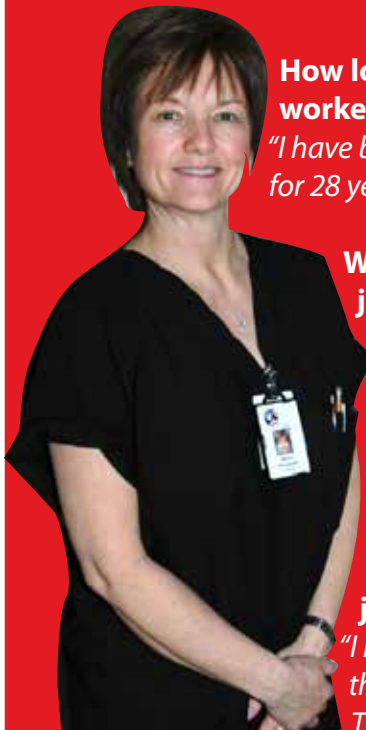
Scan with your smart phone to view more issues of The Link online.



MEET

monica hendrickson

SONOGRAPHER | OMAHA VAMC



How long have you worked at the VA?

"I have been at the VA for 28 years."

What does your job entail?

"I do general ultrasound on patients."

What do you like best about your job?

"I like the people, the patients. That is why I ended up staying here all these years."

When not at work, where can you be found?

"When not working, I can be found with family and friends."

VA ANNOUNCES SINGLE REGIONAL FRAMEWORK UNDER MYVA INITIATIVE

Internal Organizations to Realign Their Existing Structures

VHA Communications

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) recently announced it is taking the first steps under the MyVA initiative to realign its many organizational maps into one map with five regions to better serve Veterans.

The new regions under the MyVA alignment will allow VA to begin the process of integrating disparate organizational boundaries into a single regional framework to enhance internal coordination.

"We want every Veteran to have a seamless, integrated, and responsive VA customer service experience every time. This regional alignment is the first step in empowering Veterans to interact with one VA – MyVA," said Robert McDonald, Secretary of Veterans Affairs.

"Ultimately, this reform will improve the Veteran experience by enabling Veterans to more easily navigate VA and access their earned care and benefits."



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MYVA HISTORY

Launched on Sept. 2, 2014, MyVA is an initiative that will reorient VA around Veteran needs and empower employees to assist them in delivering excellent customer service to improve the Veteran experience. It is the largest department-wide transformation in VA's history, and will be a product of ideas and insights shared by Veterans, employees, members of Congress, Veteran service organizations and other stakeholders.

The first phase of MyVA has included creating the task force and building the team to support the mission and an organizational change of this breadth. MyVA is focused on five areas of improvement:

1. Improving the Veteran experience
2. Improving the employee experience so they can better serve Veterans
3. Improving internal support services
4. Establishing a culture of continuous improvement
5. Enhancing strategic partnerships

To Protect and Defend: VA NWIHCS Police Service Welcomes New Chief

Lori Bultman | Public Affairs

An important part of every Veteran's experience at the VA has nothing to do with medical care. The VA Police play an integral role to ensure all Veterans obtain their care in a safe, worry-free environment.

For the VA to provide this environment, a dedicated, well-trained leader is required. The new VA Nebraska-Western Iowa Health Care System (VA NWIHCS) Police Chief, Raul de Velasco, Jr., has assumed that duty. Chief de Velasco comes to Omaha from the Central Alabama Veterans Health Care System in Montgomery, Ala., where he served as the deputy chief of their Police Service.

"I am happy to be here in Omaha," Chief de Velasco said. He has been on station since November 2014, and has many goals for his newly acquired service.

One of the new chief's goals is to ensure VA NWIHCS campuses with VA police coverage – Omaha, Lincoln, and Grand Island – feel like one entity. He plans to visit all VA NWIHCS locations as soon as he gets settled. "I may go spend a week, or however long it takes, to visit the community based outpatient clinics, local police departments and sheriffs' offices," he said. Chief de Velasco wants to build a good rapport with local law enforcement agencies to ensure those agencies will be there for the VA when needed, he said. There are memorandums of understanding in effect with all law enforcement agencies where VA NWIHCS facilities are located, and those working relationships must be maintained, he said.

Chief de Velasco is also working diligently to equip employees with panic alarms. All employees will eventually be able to signal for assistance with the click of a computer key, he said. He also stated he realizes parking is a big issue at the Omaha VA.

"I want to find a way for patients to have easy access, while also providing ample parking for employees."

Raul de Velasco, Jr.
VA NWIHCS Police Chief

The new chief also plans to accomplish more training for his police officers. He said officers require lots of specialized training, and he is well prepared to train them. His previous duties included instructing one of the VA's first baton training and firearms courses, and he was a VA police officer trainer in 1993. He also plans to hold active-shooter response training for all employees once a plan is approved by VA Central Office.

It is important to Chief de Velasco that his officers know he will not ask them to do anything he would not do himself. "I wear my uniform to work, and I will work an officer's shift, if necessary," he said.

Chief de Velasco said he feels very welcome here at VA NWIHCS. "Everyone has been nice and helpful during my transition," he said. "But, the weather takes getting used to." The chief is married, and has two children. 🇺🇸

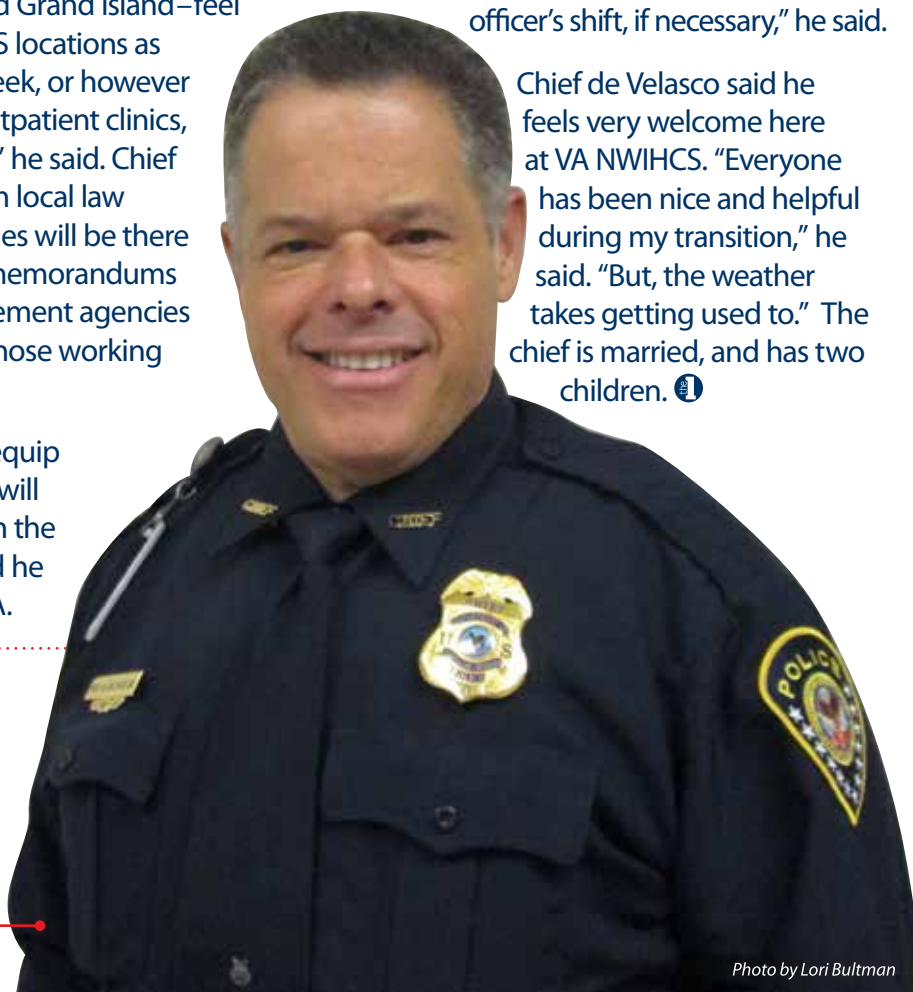


Photo by Lori Bultman

THE CHRISTMAS MOUSE

Provides Holiday Magic

Erin Grace | Courtesy of the Omaha World-Herald

The tree is an 8-foot wonder in red, white and blue. And every year, it somewhat magically appears in the entrance of the chapel inside the VA hospital in Omaha.

To see it, you must walk through the aged hospital and down a corridor to a worship room that is plain by design so it can accommodate all faiths. The tree pops up on Thanksgiving and comes down after Christmas without much fanfare. The 77-year-old retired teacher and her daughters who engage in this holiday labor each year don't want any credit.

"That's newsworthy?" asks the teacher when I reach her by phone.

In the grand scheme of things, we may think we know the answer to that question. A tree is not war. A tree is not peace. An artificial tree in a VA hospital is not Warren Buffett or Bo Pelini or Pope Francis. It's not even that big a tree.



Photos by Kent Sievers

Tell that to anyone who pops into the chapel for a moment of prayer or quiet and can find, in this large institutional building, something homey and familiar.

The teacher isn't biting.

.....
"It's just something we do to thank the Vets," she explains. "We're the little mice in the church. There are a lot of church mice."
.....

Some of the chapel's volunteers rotate the Catholic altar after Mass to prepare the room for another religion's service. Some take communion to the sick. Some labor in countless, unseen acts of assistance — bringing magazines, visiting patients, offering rides. The tree is a small part of a larger whole.

This church mouse spoke about the tree on two conditions. One, that we not identify her because she wants to remain behind the scenes. And two, that we don't call the artificial fir that she and her two daughters decorate a "Christmas" tree. This is a hall of worship for many faiths.

"It's an evergreen tree," she said, "with patriotic ornaments on it."



But tell that to the chaplain who sees vets light up when they approach the tree and look for the ornaments that bear the insignia of their service branch.

Tell that to the VA supply clerk who comes to daily Mass

before her shift and sees in that tree a reflection of the duty she owes to her co-workers and fellow vets.

The church mouse is not sure when the tree — let's call it the Patriotic Tree — first went up. The church mouse has been coming to Mass at the VA chapel since the 1970s, and she started helping its pastor at the time, a former Marine who survived Iwo Jima and had returned to his native Omaha to become a priest. Monsignor Richard Wolbach had a wobbly old artificial tree in such bad shape that it had to be propped up with hymnals.

"He was struggling with it," the church mouse said. "I asked if I could help him. I ended up helping him."

One year, no hymnal could save the tree. It wobbled and crashed.

"We lost the angel on the top and many of the ornaments," the church mouse said.

So she and her two daughters stepped in. One daughter bought a new artificial tree. She shopped for ornaments and ribbon. She painstakingly took apart sets of Christmas lights and put them back together using only red, white and blue bulbs. Both daughters help their mother drag out boxes each year and put together the Patriotic Tree.

This past Thanksgiving, the three church mice started their annual chore at 7:30 a.m. and finished five hours later. The mother mouse has macular degenerative disease, which means her eyes don't work so well. The daughters do most of the decorating.

One daughter shares a home with her mother a half-mile away from the VA. What is their tree at home like? There is none this year.

.....
"Christmas is about Christ, and that usually is our focus," said the mother church mouse. "We haven't put up a tree at our house. After you spend that many hours putting a tree up, you've had it."
.....

The church mouse is the niece and sister of Veterans. She feels deeply indebted to the men and women in the armed services. Patriotism, she said, was "the way I was brought up."

"We have always flown our flag," she said.

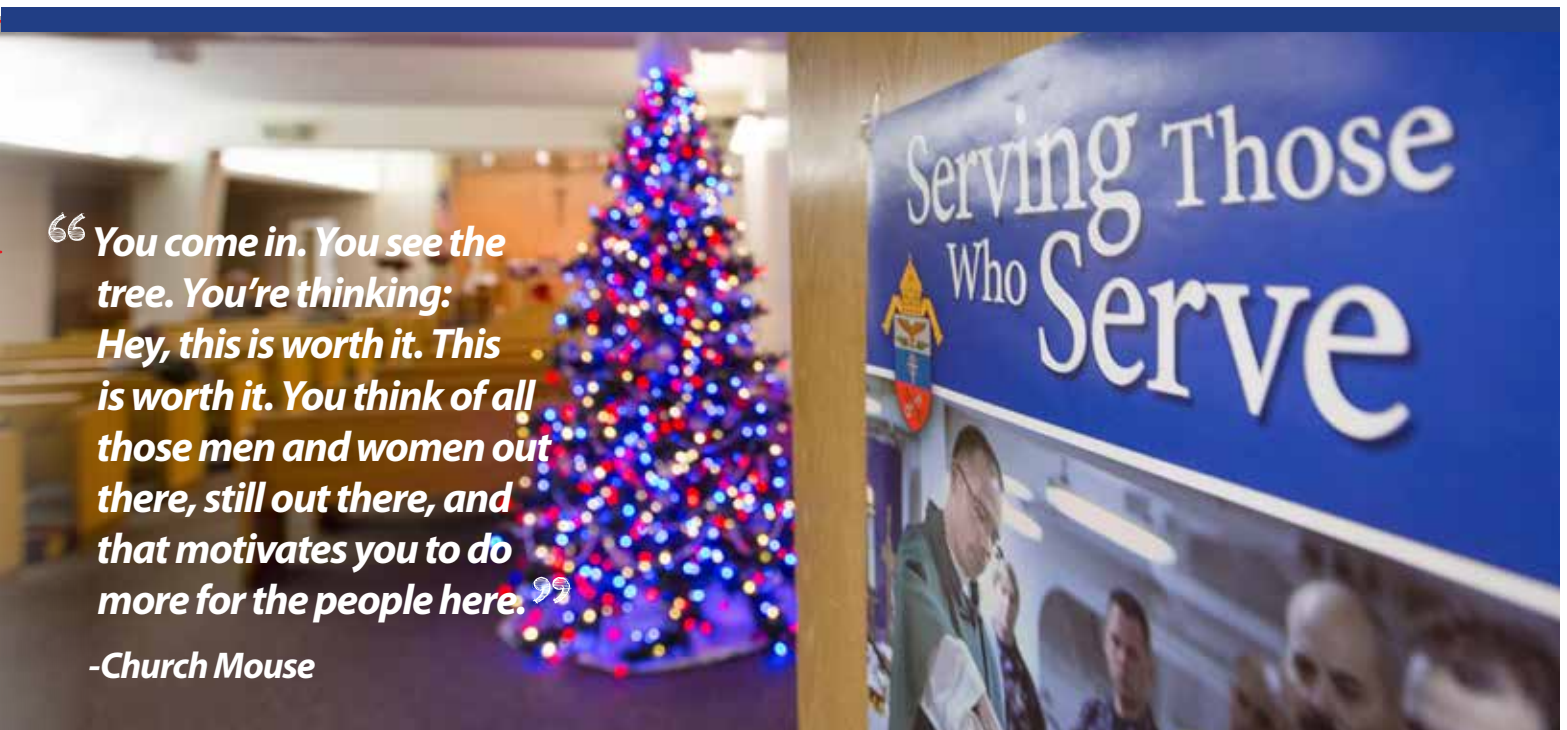
I found the church mouse in the chapel one morning last week. She was among the few who had come early to sit and listen to piped-in Gregorian chants. She was wearing all gray except for her socks. They were red for Christmas.

After the 20-minute Mass, the chapel mostly emptied. The church mouse left, too. But one person lingered at the tree.

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"You come in. You see the tree. You're thinking: Hey, this is worth it. This is worth it. You think of all those men and women out there, still out there, and that motivates you to do more for the people here."

-Church Mouse



2015 NATIONAL VETERANS COMING TO OMAHA — GOLDEN AGE GAMES —

Lori Bultman | Public Affairs

Registration will begin in February for the 29th National Veterans Golden Age Games (NVGAG), which will be held in Omaha, Neb., Aug. 8-12.

Registration for the games can be started online at www.Veteransgoldenagegames.va.gov. The registration requirements also include completing and mailing a medical clearance form, which is provided through a link on the NVGAG website. Participants must be Veterans, age 55 or older, who receive inpatient or outpatient care from the U. S. Department of Veterans Affairs.

Returning participants should note there are changes to the minimum and maximum number of events a participant may enter. Competitors must enter at least four, but no more than six, events, excluding exhibition events, said Anna Morelock, NVGAG local coordinator. This is a change from last year's policy of at least two, but not more than four, event entries. If assistance is needed completing the online registration, Veterans should contact their local VA medical facility to request assistance, she said.

Participating in the NVGAG can benefit older Veterans. "Exercise and physical activity can help maintain or partly restore strength, balance, flexibility and endurance," said Adam Oldehoeft, Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation manager at VA Nebraska-Western Iowa Health Care System (VA NWIHCS). "Staying physically active and exercising regularly can also help prevent or delay many diseases and disabilities."

VA NWIHCS was selected to host the 2015 games after submitting a bid in conjunction with the Omaha Convention and Visitors

Aug. 8-12 | Omaha, Neb.



Courtesy Photos




**PATRIOTS
ON THE PLAINS**

Bureau, hosting a site visit and being approved as the 2015 host site by then-Secretary of Veterans Affairs, Eric K. Shinseki, Morelock said. "We also went to the 2014 games in Fayetteville, Ark., to see what hosting the games would involve."

Staff from VA NWIHCS have experience hosting large events. "Our health care system sponsored the 2008 National Veterans Wheelchair Games," Morelock said. That event hosted nearly 500 wheelchair competitors. Morelock said the Fayetteville NVGAG hosted around 750 participants, and she expects the games in Omaha to bring in as many as 800 competitors.

Activities will be held at multiple locations in and around Omaha. A majority of the events will be held at the CenturyLink Center, Morelock said, but there will be events that cannot be held there. Badminton and swimming competitions will be held at the University of Nebraska Omaha; bowling will take place at Mockingbird Lanes; and the golf competition will be held at Dodge Riverside Golf Club in Council Bluffs, Iowa, she said. Track and field events will be held at Omaha's Burke High School.

Online registration for volunteers who wish to assist with the games will open in the spring, Morelock said. "We will need as many as 2,000 volunteers to assist with the many activities during this event." 

Visit the NVGAG website for additional information at www.veteransgoldenagegames.va.gov.

Caring Kind Award

★★★★★ PRESENTED TO OMAHA VA EMPLOYEE

Lori Bultman | Public Affairs

The Caring Kind award was recently presented to Donna Higgins, LCSW, Women Veterans Program Manager, at VA Nebraska-Western Iowa Health Care System (VA NWIHCS). For 35 years, the Caring Kind award has been given to Nebraska's most caring hospital workers, and honors outstanding health care employees who have demonstrated compassion for patients, cooperation with co-workers and dedication to excellence in their job responsibilities.

"Caring Kind recipients demonstrate the kindness, caring, dedication and commitment that exemplifies why health care in Nebraska continues to be among the best in the nation," said Laura J. Redoutey, president, Nebraska Hospital Association (NHA). "The NHA is proud to recognize these outstanding health care workers who have made a tremendous difference in the lives of their patients, co-workers, hospitals and communities."

Hospitals across the state each select one Caring Kind recipient from within their respective institutions to be recognized during the NHA Annual Convention.

“Higgins is an inspired advocate and ambassador for women's health, serving as Women Veterans Program Manager at the Omaha VA.”

Dr. Grace Stringfellow
VA NWIHCS Chief of Staff



Higgins successfully integrated the planning function for facilities and space with daily operations in managing this important program. She also worked to increase both enrollment and services provided for women Veterans through well-organized outreach and educational opportunities, including many armed forces outreach and Yellow Ribbon events and speaking about women's health for a local radio talk show, Stringfellow said.

Higgins is an avid proponent of patient satisfaction and development of the highest standards of care for women Veterans and all patients in the NWIHCS system, said Stringfellow. "She has developed an effective communication network for collaborating with community agencies to enhance continuity of care for women Veterans. Her work ethic, patient-centered approach, compassion for our women Veterans and dedication to mission exemplify her worthiness of this special award."

Higgins said she appreciates being recognized for her work. "I was honored that Steve Fogerty and Dr. Gary Gorby nominated me for this award," Higgins said. "I feel privileged to have a job that allows me to work with Veterans every day. To be recognized for my devotion was very inspiring and very much appreciated."

IT'S NEVER TOO LATE TO REALIZE A DREAM

Will Ackerman | Public Affairs

James Plummer, a U.S. Army World War II Veteran, entered the military as part of the Greatest Generation to serve his nation when it needed him. In doing so, he didn't finish high school.

“I was too young, when I was in high school. I wasn't even able to graduate.”

James Plummer | U.S. Army Veteran

Although World War II ended in 1945, Plummer never had the chance to go back to finish and graduate.

His day finally arrived Jan. 16, nearly 60 years after the war, when he received an honorary high school diploma at the VA Nebraska-Western Iowa Health Care System Community Living Center, Grand Island, Neb.


A program called “Operation Recognition” enables Veterans from World War II and the Korean War to receive honorary diplomas in place of the ones they missed out on when they left to fight in these wars, said Ken Ward, recreation therapist at the CLC.

“It's an opportunity to honor our Veterans for their self-sacrifice to our country, to remember their courage and willingness to defend our country.”

Ken Ward, Recreational Therapist | Grand Island CLC

Angela Williams, Grand Island VA site manager, presented Plummer his diploma in a ceremony that featured him wearing a graduation cap and gown, a procession down the CLC hallway with the traditional pomp and circumstance music and led by a VA employee carrying the U.S. flag. VA employees joined in the celebration, with each personally shaking Plummer's hand after the ceremony.

“It means a great deal,” Plummer said, as he looked at his diploma. “It was a surprise to me. I never did think I'd get it.”

Operation Recognition is a collaboration between the Nebraska Department of Veterans Affairs and the Nebraska Department of Education. Since the program was implemented in 1999, more than 1,700 honorary diplomas have been awarded to eligible Veterans. 

To learn more about how to help World War II or Korean War Veteran apply for an honorary high school diploma, visit www.vets.state.ne.us.

Left: Angela Williams, PharmD, Grand Island VA site manager, presented James Plummer an honorary high school diploma at the Community Living Center Jan. 16.



Photo by Will Ackerman

Compassionate Care Extends Beyond Clinic Walls

Will Ackerman and Lori Bultman | Public Affairs

Nurses at the VA Nebraska-Western Iowa Health Care System are well-known for providing compassionate care to Veterans. Their commitment to Veterans doesn't stop with health care, though. The Omaha VA Medical Center's Green Clinic Unit-Based Subcommittee (UBSC) helped Veterans who needed assistance during the holidays through the generosity of its members.



Photo by Will Ackerman

Front row from left: Jackie Scepaniak LPN, Surgical Specialty Clinic; Erin Griffin, RN, Surgical Specialty Clinic Manager; Sandy McKinney, Eye Tech, Orange Clinic; Linda Crowe Medical Support Assistant, Orange Clinic. Back row from left: Sharon Galliant, LPN, Surgical Specialty Clinic; Scott Kubicek, Orthopedic Case Manager; Matt Benn, RN, Surgical Specialty Clinic; Tracy Wilson, RN, Surgical Specialty Clinic.

The UBSC hosted a free-will donation this past holiday season during two unit luncheons that raised more than \$800, said Tracy Wilson, RN, Gynecology Case Manager, Urology Clinic. "My employees opened their hearts to families in need."

The UBSC helped U.S. Army Veteran Jason Regis, (right) a former combat engineer. Regis retired in 2013 after deployments to Iraq and Afghanistan, where he was injured by a roadside bomb. He is now a single father of three boys, ages 7, 4 and 18 months. Finding work that fits in with his single-father responsibilities, and that can use his unique skill set – bomb disposal – has been daunting.



Photo by Lori Bultman

"Child-friendly jobs are hard to find," Regis said. In addition, not many employers need bomb-disposal specialists in Omaha, he said.

Shortly before the holidays, Regis' social worker, Shannon Vondra, LCSW, asked him if he needed assistance. "There wasn't extra for gifts this year," Regis said. "It was good timing."

The UBSC worked with Vondra to identify Regis' need, and donated \$500 to assist his family. Vondra asked Regis for ideas on what his boys would like or need.


“They nailed it with the gifts for the kids. They came a week before Christmas, and they even brought wrapping paper.”

Jason Regis | U.S. Army Veteran

The other \$300 went to help formerly homeless Veterans who recently were placed in housing through the VA's Mental Health Specialty Services. They bought necessity items such as towels, new clothes, jackets, socks and footwear, said Matt Benn, RN, Neurosurgery Clinic.

"We divided up the donations to help the Veterans with what they needed the most," Benn said.

The UBSC has helped Veterans in need through these good-will donations for many years. It's another way the compassionate care the nurses provide to Veterans exceeds beyond clinical treatment.

"This shows a lot of caring hearts who want to provide for our Veterans," Wilson said. 

THE BLUEPRINT FOR EXCELLENCE

Lays Road Map for VHA Transformation

VHA Communications

The Veterans Health Administration (VHA) embodies the promise of a grateful nation in the form of the quality health care that Veterans have earned through their service and sacrifices. Although the covenant with Veterans is immutable, health care evolves and so must VHA.

In the late 1990's VHA evolved from a hospital-centric model to become a delivery system, offering exemplary measured performance in a range of care settings.

Today, the Veterans Health Administration's (VHA) "Blueprint for Excellence" lays out strategies for transforming to improve the performance of VA health care now — making it more Veteran-centric by putting Veterans in control of their VA experience.

While a dedicated system of health and social services for Veterans remains the core means for meeting Veterans' care needs, the Veterans Access, Choice and Accountability Act of 2014 introduces new possibilities for serving Veterans. The four themes and 10 essential strategies contained in the Blueprint for Excellence frame a set of activities that simultaneously address improving the performance of VHA health care now, developing a positive service culture, transitioning from "sick care" to "health care" in the broadest sense, and developing agile business systems and management processes that are efficient, transparent and accountable.

All Veterans deserve health care that is sensitive to their unique service exposures and health risks. To make this happen, VA must strive for seamlessness externally with the Department of Defense and internally, across all units of VA. They must foster new relationships with non-VA care and service providers and national, state and local organizations whose service can benefit Veterans. Most fundamentally, however, they must address how all resources entrusted to them are organized and realize the Triple Aim – better health, care and value – as a system goal and achieving optimal health and well-being as a goal for every Veteran who entrusts VA with their life. 📌



THIS "BLUEPRINT FOR EXCELLENCE" CONTEMPLATES WHAT IS NECESSARY FOR THE VHA TO BECOME THE SYSTEM THAT VETERANS DESERVE BY:

- **Improving performance,**
- **Promoting a positive culture of service,**
- **Advancing health care innovation for Veterans and the country, and**
- **Increasing operational effectiveness and accountability.**

For more information, visit http://www.va.gov/HEALTH/docs/VHA_Blueprint_for_Excellence.pdf.

**HONORING SERVICE
EMPOWERING
HEALTH**

February is Library Lovers' Month.

Where do you get your books, reading materials?



I use the Sump Library in Papillion for books and DVDs.

Kathy Veiman, Pharmacist
U.S. Air Force Veteran | Bellevue CBOC

With the exception of our hometown newspaper, because it is not online, everything I read is online. Whether it is a book on my [tablet] or a newspaper, I read almost everything electronically. It cuts down on clutter and is always at my fingertips.

Heather Benzel, RN
Quality Management | Grand Island CBOC



We go to the Milton R. Abrahams Branch Library. I take my 10-year-old daughter every Saturday. She loves reading.

Azibataram Fatoye-Alagoa, LPN
Red Clinic | Omaha VAMC



I get my books at the public library. I get them to transfer books from the W. Dale Clark Library downtown to my local branch at Benson.

Charlie Price, Environmental Management Services
U.S. Air Force Veteran | Omaha VAMC

Creighton University book store provides me with most of my books for working on my master's degree in Nursing. I also use the AMEDD Center & School Library, Fort Sam Houston. Online, I read the U.S. Sergeant Major Academy updates and I have Gun Dog and Ducks Unlimited sent to the house.

Bradly Anderson, RN; Mental Health
Nebraska Army National Guard | Grand Island CBOC



Reservist VA Nurse Honors Manager, Supervisor with **PATRIOT AWARD**

Will Ackerman | Public Affairs

The manager and clinical supervisor at the VA Nebraska-Western Iowa Health Care System Community Living Center, Grand Island, Neb., were presented the Patriot Award by the Employer Support of the Guard and Reserve Oct. 14.

Lisa Cantrell, RN, CLC manager, and Alice Gloynes, RN, clinical supervisor, were recognized for their support of Dawn Hinrichs, LPN, who is a petty officer second class hospital corpsman in the U.S. Navy Reserves.

Hinrichs nominated them for the award to recognize their support of the time she is away from VA employment at drill duty with the Reserve.

“I wanted them to know how very grateful I am for their support.”

Dawn Hinrichs, LPN | U.S. Navy Reserves | Grand Island VA

The ESGR award recognizes employers that support their employees who are in the Guard or Reserve, according to the

organization's website. The Patriot Award recognizes the supervisors or managers individually for supporting “citizen warriors” through “flexible schedules, time off prior to and after deployment, caring for families and granting leaves of absence, if needed.”

Hinrichs is required to attend drill at Offutt Air Force Base one weekend each month and for a two-week period during the year. Although Hinrichs' time away from work “can be difficult,” Cantrell said, people serving in any of the U.S. military are “the reason we are here.”

“They are whom we serve at the VA,” Cantrell said. In addition, Reservists and guardsmen “understand and live the mission of the VA.”

For more information about the ESGR, visit www.esgr.mil.

HELLO

Sept. 7 to Dec. 27, 2014

BRIANNA AGBEKPONOU, Nursing

JANELLE ALTMAN, Nursing

GEORGE ANDRINGA, Engineering

SAMANTHA BAKER-GREGORY,
Mental Health

AKEEM BANISTER, VA Police

HEATHER BATT, Business Office

PHYLLIS BEHRENS, Nursing

ANDREW BOELL, Environmental
Management Service

BARBARA BOLTER, Fiscal

STEPHEN BONASERA,
Extended Care and Rehabilitation

JEFFREY BOYLE,
Environmental Management Service

ANNETTE BRANDL, Business Office

TRENT BREC, Business Office

JOHN BRODERICK, Business Office

MARIA CAIN, Logistics

EMILY CARLSON, Human Resources

DAVID CARTER, Omaha Vet Center

HEATHER CHERRINGTON, Finance

MARY CHRISTENSEN, Nursing

KALEB CUE,
Veterans Canteen Service

PATRICK DALY, VA Research

PHILIP DAUBENMIER, Nursing

JESSICA DEAN, Mental Health

PUNITA DHAWAN, VA Research

STACY DUFAULT, Director's Office

CARRIE DUSOE,
Veterans Canteen Service

AMBER ERNESTER, Business Office

KATHRYN FARRENS,
Veterans Canteen Service

AMY FINK, Nursing

DENNIS FOUNTAIN, Business Office

JAMIE FROST, Social Work

PERRY HINES,
Environmental Management Service

GREG HINES, Nursing

ROY HURD, Engineering

SHAARAIM JAMIER,
Environmental Management Service

TRISTA JELINEK, Business Office

JULIE JOHNS, Business Office

LORI JOHNSON, Director's Office

TYLER KAPPLE, Prosthetics

MANU KAUSHIK,
Primary Care and Specialty Medicine

ALONZO LAMB III,
Environmental Management Service

JUSTIN LAMMERT, VA Police

SCOTT LIESWALD, Business Office

JESSICA LINDAHL, Business Office

MEREDITH LINDSTROM, Nursing

THOMASA MARTINEZ,
Veterans Canteen Service

RYLEY MAYHALL, VA Police

BENJAMIN MCDERMOTT,
Engineering

RANDALL MCHUGH, VA Police

SHANE MORITZ,
Environmental Management Service

KRISHNA MURTHY, Mental Health

MELODY NEWSON, Mental Health

CHRISTOPHER PAVLOVSKI,
Human Resources

ZAKI PHILLIPS, Mental Health

SARAH PODERYS, Nursing

DONNA PONCHAK, Nursing

STEPHANIE POPE, Nursing

WESLEY PRICKETT, Rehabilitation

TIMOTHY RAYNER, Nursing

EDWARD RETIKIS, Nursing

JENNIFER ROBINSON,
Mental Health

ALVIN SCOTT,
Environmental Management Service

CURTIS SEVERSON, Engineering

ANGELA SHEHAN, Nursing

THOMAS SHIELDS, Engineering

LILLIE SMITH, Nursing

STEPHANIE SMITH, Nursing

HILLARY STARK, Nursing

BARBARA STEELE, Business Office

ELTON STEVENSON, VA Police

TONJAIH THOMAS, VA Police

LISA TIPTON-WYLIE, Nursing

NICHOLAS VINT, Mental Health

WILLIAM WILCOXSON,
Environmental Management Service

GOODBYE

ADEJOKE AGBAJE, Pharmacy

SARAH ALLEN, Nursing

JEFFREY ARCHER, Logistics

ELIAS BAINBRIDGE,
Veterans Canteen Service

SARAH BEDTELYON, Nursing

KILEY BERA,
Veterans Canteen Service

REBECCA BIRD, Laboratory

JEFFREY BOYLE, Prosthetics

JOHN BRODERICK, Business Office

JASON BUCKHOLD, Director's Staff

AMY CAMACHO, Nursing

MARY CHRISTENSEN, Nursing

MARNA COCHELL, Engineering

JULIE COSTELLO, Nursing

CARRIE DUSOE,
Veterans Canteen Service

QUIN ELIZABETH KELLY, Nursing

PEGGY ELLINGRUD, Nursing

NIKKI ENGEL, Business Office

KELLY FARRIS,
Veterans Canteen Service

JAMIE FROST, Social Work

NANCY GAYNOR, Business Office

JACOB GREGORY, Business Office

TINA GUINTO, Business Office

DONALD HAFERBIER, Nursing

MICHAEL HARRIS,
Human Resources

WILLIAM HARRISON, Imaging

DAWN HARVEY, Business Office

AMY HAUBRICH, Nursing

LUKE HERITAGE, Mental Health

KATHLEEN HIRSCH, Nursing

AMANDA HJORTH, Mental Health

CLINTON HUEY, Nursing

SAJAN JACOB, Mental Health

CHANNELL KAIMIKAU, Nursing

MERCEDE KIRKLAND-DOYLE,
Director's Office

MARK KULA, VA Police

ANNE MARGARET JUAREZ,
Nursing

MYRON MASON,
Environmental Management Service

JEANN MEYER HOAGLAND,
Chief of Staff's Office

MATTHEW MILLER,
Veterans Canteen Service

SHAUNIELLE MOSLEY,
Volunteer Service

JENNY NGOC NGUYEN, Nursing

STEPHANIE NORD, Business Office

ROGER NUTT,
Primary Care and Specialty Medicine

DARREN PARKS, Nursing

HOWARD PHILLIPPI, Nursing

VANESSA QUEVEDO-WOOLS,
Business Office

GLORIA REED, Business Office

GAYLE REYES, Nursing

KIMBERLY RICHARDSON,
Business Office

ROBERT ROBINSON II,
Mental Health

CARL ROBINSON, Surgery

ROSE ROSSELL, Nursing

DAVID RUSSELL, Mental Health

ARIF SATTAR,
Primary Care and Specialty Medicine

JEREMIAH SCHNOOR, Nursing

MICHAEL SCHOENBERGER,
Prosthetics

ANGIE SCOTT, Business Office

MEGHAN SHIPLETT,
Veterans Canteen Service

HEATHER SIMONSEN,
Business Office

BRITNEY STAMM, Mental Health

KIMBERLY STRAUSBAUGH,
Business Office

TREVOR STRYKER, Mental Health

DOROTHY SUTPHEN,
Human Resources

TIMOTHY TERRELL, Business Office

JONATHAN TILK, Business Office

CATHY TSUCHIYAMA, Nursing

MARK TUPPER, Engineering

KRISTIN TURNER,
Learning Resources

SARA URWILLER, Mental Health

CANDY VAN DORIN,
Veterans Canteen Service

GARY WALKER,
Environmental Management Service

STEPHEN WALLS, Business Office

HOPE WILKINSON,
Volunteer Service

ALAN WOODS, Learning Resources

SHERYL YOUNG, Business Office

JESSICA ZOERB, Nursing

RETIRING

LYNNETTE ANDERSON, Nursing

JEANNE BABER,
Decision Support Service

MELVIN BAXTER, Environmental
Management Service

DEBORAH CARLSON,
Grand Island Nursing Director

DAVID DICKERSON

BARBARA DILWORTH, Nursing

TERRENCE DONOHUE, VA Research

ELLEN HOOPER, Nursing

WILLIAM MORA

EDDIE NOWKA, Laboratory

DENNIS PEDERSEN, Engineering

JAMES ROOD, Chief of Staff Office

JOHNNY ROBERTS, Nursing

PATRICIA SNYDER, Nursing

DENNIS WAGONER, VA Police

(The Christmas Mouse continued from page 7)

"I love looking at that tree," said Maria Cain, a 47-year-old Air Force Veteran who served during Operation Desert Storm. "It's very therapeutic to me. The colors, you know? The red, white and blue."

Cain now works as a federal employee for the VA. She is a supply technician who works in logistics and basically helps keep the hospital stocked.

Cain talked about how she goes to Mass before her shift to start her day right. She said it's nice to see other VA employees, along with the public, in the church pews and feel a sense of community.

And that tree? Each time she looks at it, she thinks about the people who served and the Veterans she now serves. It makes her both grateful and humble and fills her with a deep sense of duty.

"You come in. You see the tree. You're thinking: Hey, this is worth it. This is worth it," she said. "You think of all those men and women out there, still out there, and that motivates you to do more for the people here."

The church mouse may be hidden. But her work is not. 🐭



IT'S YOUR CALL

Confidential help for Veterans and their families



Confidential chat at [VeteransCrisisLine.net](https://www.VeteransCrisisLine.net)

(MyVA History continued from page 4)

VA's new regional design uses state boundaries to divide the country into five regions. Each organization within VA will begin work to ensure its structures are aligned within this framework by the end of June.

Veterans are already seeing the impact of changes made through the MyVA initiative. For example, at the suggestion of VA employees, the department has made improvements to VA call center operations by allowing its agents to suspend or resume certain benefit payments at the request of the Veteran, which eliminates additional steps typically

events WHAT'S GOING ON?

- Feb. 4** VA Food Pantry, Community Resource and Referral Center, 825 Dorcas St., Omaha
- Feb. 6** Wear Red Day – Events to raise awareness for women's cardiac health at Omaha VAMC, Grand Island VA CBOC and Lincoln VA CBOC
- Feb. 8-14** VA National Salute to Veteran Patients Week
- Feb. 9-15** Random Acts of Kindness Week
- Feb. 11** National Shut-In Visitation Day
- Feb. 13** Free tax assistance for Veterans and VA Employees at Lincoln VA CBOC
- Feb. 14** Valentine's Day
- Feb. 16** Presidents' Day (federal holiday)
- Feb. 18** VA Food Pantry, Community Resource and Referral Center, 825 Dorcas St., Omaha
- Feb. 20** VA CoffeeHaus, Lincoln VA CBOC
- Feb. 22** President Washington's Birthday
- Feb. 23** Iwo Jima Day Anniversary
- Feb. 26** Kuwait Liberation Day
- Feb. 27** Free tax assistance for Veterans and VA Employees at Lincoln VA CBOC

For more information about VA NWIHCS events, visit www.nebraska.va.gov.



required of Veterans. Also, at the suggestion of employees, VA is working toward piloting improved signage in certain facilities to ensure Veterans know where they are going and that directions are easy to follow.

Additional VA efforts are currently under way to define the next steps in transforming the department into one that is more centered on the Veteran. 🇺🇸



FEBRUARY 2 – MARCH 13

TEAM UP: Join your co-workers for a six-week health weight campaign—all VA employees are welcome.

CHART YOUR PROGRESS: You will record your weight each week, which will contribute to your team's total weight loss. All teams will be listed on the leaderboard.

Watch your team's progress and get weekly encouragement from the VA WIN team.

SIGN UP: Learn more about the campaign and register online from January 5th to February 6th.



VAWIN.foh.hhs.gov/IWIN



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